

What to Expect from Tourism Extension in the Coming Years?

Overview:

The NC State University Tourism Extension Office completed an assessment of NC Cooperative Extension Service (CES) personnel's needs for tourism-related programs and materials in July 2013. This project was initiated to reconcile on-the-ground extension needs with the expertise of the new Tourism Extension specialists appointed during the summer of 2012. Study results, which will guide Tourism Extension Office (TE) efforts, highlight a need for increasing awareness of tourism resources, events, economic impacts, and benefits within county CES offices. Study results also indicate a desire for an event planning training program and an agritourism business start-up factsheet, as well as the continued delivery of existing programs with updated materials.



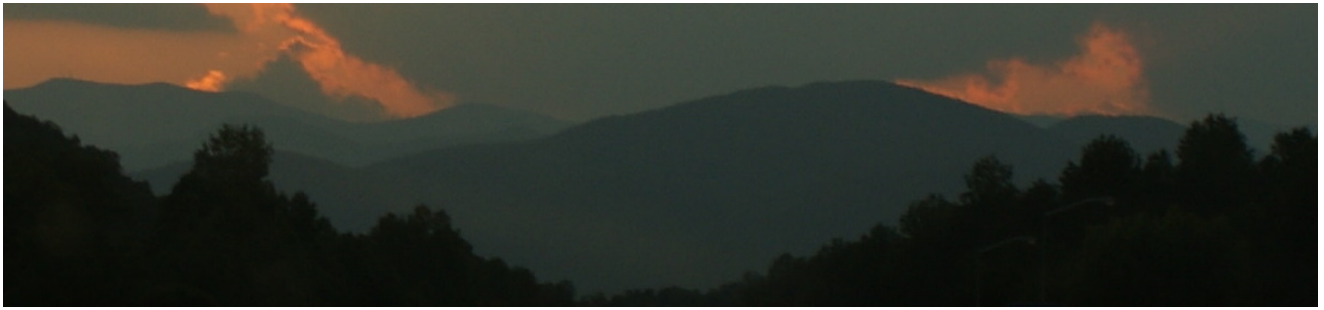
The Process:

Focus Groups

Beginning in November, 2012, Tourism Extension personnel hosted focus groups in each of the five CES districts, and invited CES personnel to Raleigh for two program-specific focus groups (NC Hospitality; the Birder Friendly Business Program). In total, 49 CES personnel provided valuable information on their specific needs and recommended improvements to our TE existing programs. This information was compiled to develop a cumulative list of suggested programs and materials, which was later used to develop a survey.

Survey

Based on the focus groups results, an online survey was developed and administered to all CES personnel to identify their most pressing tourism-related program and training needs. In May 2013 CES personnel received a pre-survey notice, the initial survey request, two reminder emails, and a participation thank you e-mail. All correspondence was administered through the CES master listserv. A total of 112 surveys were completed (14% response rate).

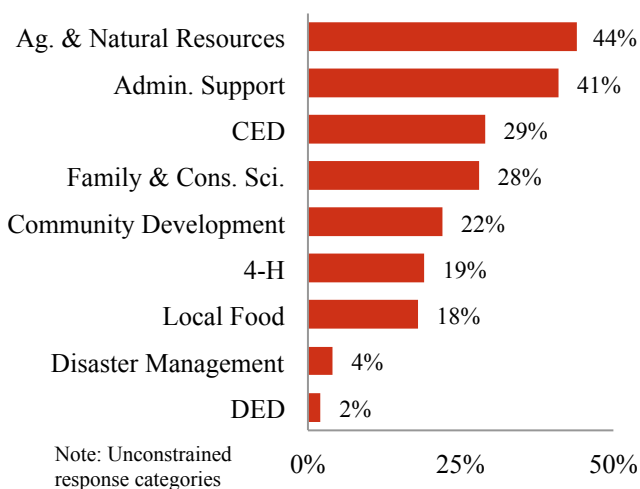


Results & Action Plans:

Responses from all five districts, as well as all program focus areas were received. Respondents included administrative assistants, county agents, county directors, and district directors. District responses ranged from 9% to 17%. Participation rates largely varied across NC CES program areas; Agriculture & Natural Resources, Administrative Support, CED's and Family & Consumer Sciences were the areas from which the highest participation was received (Figure 1).

Although few respondents reported prior experience with the TE Office, nearly one-half (43.8%) had provided tourism information to stakeholders in the past.

Figure 1: Respondents by Program Area



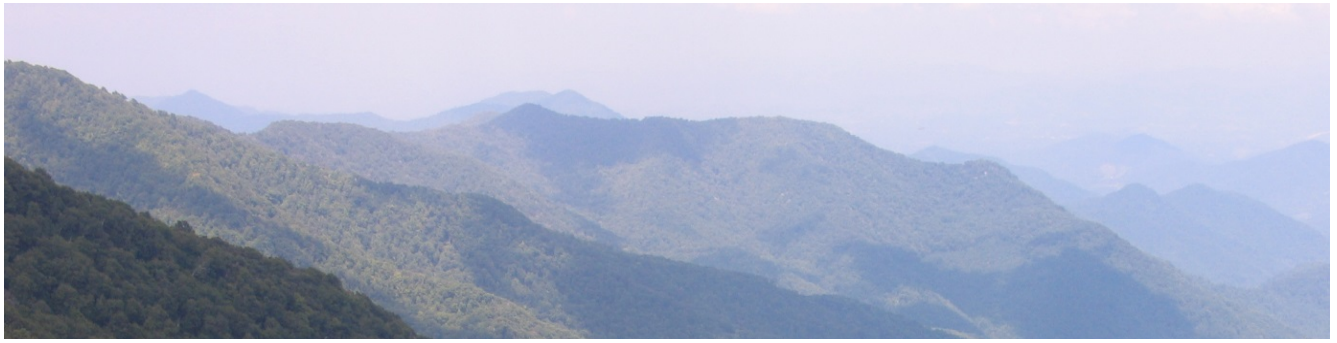
On-going Programs and Partnerships:

NC Hospitality: Focus group results revealed that the general drawbacks of this program were the narrow target audience (frontline hospitality workers) and a lack of flexibility which would allow CES agents to include other stakeholder groups. There was moderate interest in future NC Hospitality training. Redesign efforts will enhance flexibility and expand target audiences.

Birder Friendly Business (BFB): Survey respondents expressed relatively low interest in the BFB program. Focus groups revealed limited interest is likely due to agents' perceptions that extensive birding knowledge is required for program implementation. An online stakeholder certification format is currently being considered for this program.

Homegrown Handmade (HGHM): Focus groups revealed concern that the HGHM website was out-of-date but that there was substantial interest in adding new businesses to the marketing network. Nearly two-thirds of survey respondents were at least somewhat interested in HGHM program. The TE office is currently coordinating a strategic planning process with HGHM partners to develop a renewed project vision.

People-First Tourism (PIT): About one-third of survey respondents reported being very or extremely interested in the PIT program, despite the focus groups revealing limited awareness of the program. The PIT program is currently expanding throughout NC and will be developing an agent-training.

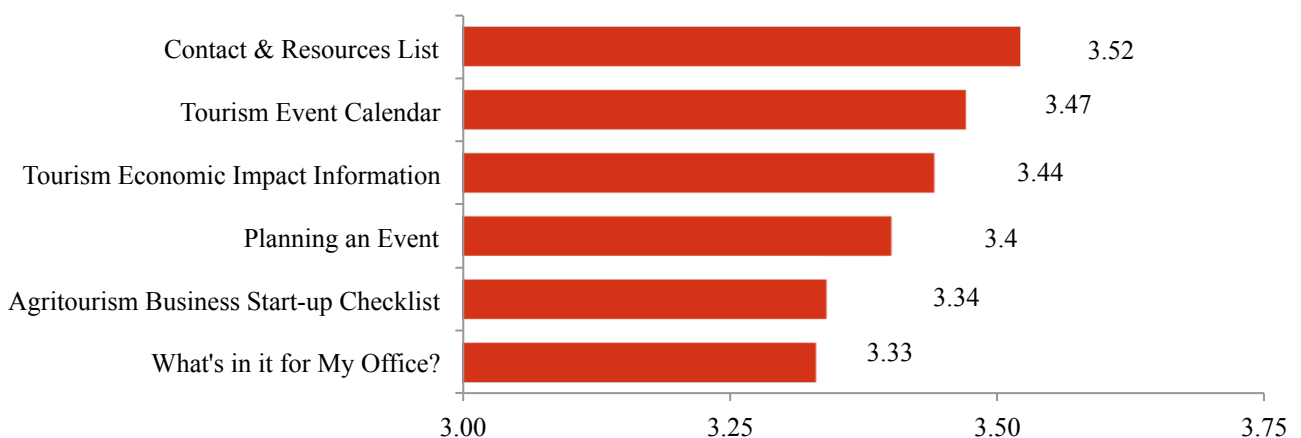


New Programs & Materials

The five highest ranked programs and materials are displayed in Figure 2. The Resource Contact List, Tourism Event Calendar, and Economic Impact Factsheet will be created as partnerships are developed with tourism offices across the State. Event Planning Factsheets will be developed as specific agent and stakeholder needs are further identified. The TE Office also hopes to increase awareness of tourism’s role in CES by developing a factsheet called “What’s in it for My Office.” An Agritourism Business Start-up Checklist is a resource currently available through the NC Department of Agriculture & Consumer Sciences’ Agritourism Office: So You Want to Start an Agritourism Farm?

Other programs and materials that were suggested and commonly rated, on average, with moderate interest included: a market ready checklist for tourism businesses; agritourism in action (learning from others through farm tours); marketing for entrepreneurs (defining and reaching target audiences); tourism business start-up financing and risks; civic engagement (enhancing tourism development through community volunteerism and activism).

Figure 2. Survey Respondents’ Interest in Programs & Materials



Note: Items measured on a scale from 1 (not at all interested) to 5 (extremely interested)



Acknowledgements

We would like to thank NC CES for providing the funding for this Needs Assessment, as well as all the personnel who gave their time to take part in focus groups and online survey.

Photo credits

Photos supplied courtesy of Jennifer Iyengar.



Jennifer Iyengar, Graduate Research Assistant

Erin Seekamp, PhD, Assistant Professor & Extension Specialist
Carla Barbieri, PhD, Assistant Professor & Extension Specialist
Duarte Morais, PhD, Associate Professor & Extension Specialist

*Department of Parks, Recreation & Tourism Management
College of Natural Resources
North Carolina State University*

Published by North Carolina Cooperative Extension



NC STATE UNIVERSITY